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THE ARCTIC RAILWAY.

THE year 1903 saw the completion of an enterprise which in most years, when men were not too busy thinking of other things, would surely have attracted more attention than it has. A fresh record has been made. A railway refreshment room, and a very good one moreover, is to be found further north of the Arctic Circle than it has ever been found before. And an age which lives on records, and which can console itself for the unparalleled discomfort of the past rainy season by the reflection that no one living has ever been quite so wet and miserable before, owes it to itself to take an interest in the Arctic Railway. In the July of last year, King Oscar of Sweden formally opened for passenger traffic—it had been informally opened so far back as November 1902—the portion of the line which runs from Gellivara, in Swedish Lapland, across the divide to its terminus at Narvik in Norway, on the Ofoten Fjord. The line from Gellivara downwards to Lulea, at the head of the Gulf of Bothnia, had been working since 1887, and the Great Northern line from Stockholm up the Bothnian coast had been completed piece by piece, till it reached the Gellivara branch at Boden. The ingenious traveller who prefers land to water can now contrive to reach these Arctic regions with no more serious sea passage—there is one which is longer, but in smooth water, from Kiel to Korsør—than the Dover to Calais crossing.

The Arctic region, however, through which this railway passes, I must caution the tourist who is in search of something exciting, is by no means the inhospitable ice-clad affair which it sounds. The truth is, that in Europe the Arctic Circle is a little bit of a fraud. Except in winter, the districts of Sweden and Norway are, though somewhat rugged and infertile, especially in the high fjeld, anything but icy. The man who wants ice and snow in any quantity in summer will have to make troublesome journeys to get to it, and he will find a great deal more of it, and more easily, in Switzerland, the Tyrol, or Spain. And the making of this railway, though very interesting, is not the achievement which a similar undertaking would be in Asia or America. It is

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rather on account of its commercial importance, and as I venture to think and shall presently try to show, because of its possible future bearing on the political map of Europe, that the Arctic Railway will hereafter take its place among the interesting highways of the world.

The line owes its existence in the first instance to the presence of deposits of iron ore, in the eastern portion of Swedish Lapland, of extraordinary richness. Without becoming too statistical, I may mention that the 'Malmberg' or ore mountain of Gellivara yields annually something like a million tons of iron ore which contains sixty to seventy per cent. of pure metal. Richer still is the deposit of Luossovaara at Kiiruna, where the ore is quarried direct from a hill over 3,000 feet high, and is even of better quality than that of Gellivara. The quantity of ironstone in this hill has been estimated at nearly 250,000,000 tons, and now that the line is open to the sea it is proposed to make this mountain disappear at the rate of 1,500,000 tons a year. If this takes place, the world will be presented in 150 years with a demonstration of the kind which it can best appreciate, that capital, if not faith, can remove mountains.

A great deal might be written of the history of the line since its commencement, and a great many statistics might be added, which, however, my readers may prefer to take as read. It may be enough to say that the original line from Gellivara to Lulea was built by an English company between the years 1884 and 1887, and out of their ill-starred intermittent records one may quote one interesting fact as going to prove that the engineering difficulties were by no means serious—namely, that in the summer of 1886, below Gellivara, the line was built and the rails were laid at the astonishing rate of one kilometre each working day. You may count the hours, of course, of a working day in full summer at eighteen to twenty-two. That same English company—who, by the way, had succeeded to an irregular service of reindeer sledges and ponies—went the way of many companies, and for a time all work ceased on the promised line. But in 1896 the Swedish Government commenced operations with a will. The line was carried northwards to Kiiruna and thence to the southern shores of Lake Torné, and thence in a westerly direction to the Norwegian Sea.

The scenery through which this northern line from Boden to Narvik passes is, it must be frankly owned, somewhat disappointing.

It is the duty of the engineer to select the line of least resistance, and very admirably has he done it: in this instance the said line leads naturally over the enormous 'Myr' peat-moors and mosses which abound everywhere along the coast of the Gulf of Bothnia. These are commonly united, or separated, by vast tracts of forest land, and here again the line, naturally, skirts the low-lying and less broken edges of the wood. There is no reason for challenging the finer features of Lapland scenery by attacking mountains which can easily be avoided. And the traveller who runs up the line with the idea that he will thereby see the true beauty of the country, or indeed learn the secrets of Lapland, will be seriously misled. He will not see nor learn half so much as if he should start from the Norwegian side, on any of the routes that lead across the divide to the Swedish side, and make his way thence on foot or by boat. The traveller by rail will, in fact, be surprised to find how very little the Arctic portion of his route differs from anything which he has seen in his upward journey from Stockholm, except, of course, that habitable spots are few and far between, and farming land such as he has seen in the south wholly wanting. Otherwise the general character of forest and moorland is monotonously similar, merely becoming more poverty-stricken as one advances to the Polar Circle. The finest part of the scenery of Inner Lapland lies nearly all the time far away to the east, and is visible only here and there in faint blue masses, with an occasional cap of pure white snow above it, as the train passes through the gap made in the landscape by one of the many rivers which the line has to cross. The finest part of the journey begins after the train has left Kiiruna, and makes the bend westwards along the southern shore of Lake Torné. This is a really beautiful bit of travelling, especially in September, when the dwarf birch and *krokeboer* have turned crimson and russet and gold, carpeting the whole sweep of the great desolate moorlands, till they meet the deep blue of the far-off mountains. The finest spot on the line is perhaps the Gorge of Abisko, at no great distance from the frontier. A morning spent here, with the storms sweeping across the great lake below, gave one a feast of colour which cannot easily be forgotten. Half an hour or so after one has left the place on the journey westwards one finds oneself among the treeless desolations of the higher fjeld which divides Sweden from Norway.

But if the Swedish part of the Lulea-Ofoten Railway is less

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beautiful than many other portions of internal Lapland, on the other hand, the Norwegian portion of the line, which winds round and round the precipitous cliffs of the Ofoten Fjord, is as magnificent as anything in Norway. The man who is in search of a new sensation might do worse than perform this journey, as the writer did, in the brake-van of a metal train. And if a coupling-chain should break at certain points during the downward passage to the sea level, he will obtain most assuredly some wholly unexpected experiences.

The immediate results of this new railway are easy to foresee and to foretell. The most obvious of these is the immediate growth and increase of the populations at the great iron centres of Gellivara and Kiiruna, to be followed at intervals by the creation of similar, though perhaps less important, centres here and there, within reach of the main line, as new iron fields are explored. It may, however, be safely predicted that the increase of population will be mainly confined to the industrial centres themselves. It is not possible that these mining centres should call into existence an agricultural population in the immediate neighbourhood to supply their needs, because nature has set her veto against such developments except upon the very smallest scale. The spots of land on which the Swedish settler, most industrious and most capable of his sort in any land whatever, could extort a living out of the soil, are few and far between, and even the most successful settler in such circumstances can rarely produce enough to do more than to keep his family. Of surplus production there is always so little that it need scarcely be considered, and the future mining towns of Swedish Lapland, destined without doubt to reach a high degree of prosperity, will have to depend for their support mainly on supplies brought either from the Norwegian coast or from the Gulf of Bothnia. Indeed, there is one point of view, very little taken into account so far, which would lead us to expect for many years to come an actual diminution of the inhabitants of Norbotten, exclusive of these said mining centres. The nomad Lapps, destined doubtless to pass away from among the races of mankind, will, I venture to prophesy, find their extinction accelerated by this very railroad. The Lapp, who is the most improvident of creatures, and who, like all half civilised races, is absolutely without control if drink be brought within his reach, has the habit, say rather the necessity, of driving down his reindeer off the high fjeld, where they roam

over the reindeer lichen in the summer, to the nearest towns (so called), where his reindeer are sheltered and his children taught during the winter. It is this contact with civilisation that kills him out—partly by intermarriage, which causes him slowly to be absorbed in the stronger races; but far more rapidly and completely by a literal killing out. He meets the dealer there, and improvident as he is he is easily tempted to part with many of his reindeer for ready money, or too often for drink. I have heard it said that a Lapp far gone in liquor will sometimes part with one of his best reindeer for a bottle or two of 'brand-vin.' And many a Lapp goes back to the fjeld with a sadly diminished herd, a poor man instead of a rich.

In the district which I know best, and to which I resort most often, in twelve years the reindeer have diminished from 37,000 to an approximate 7,000. Moreover, strange to say, as the quantity of reindeer diminishes the difficulty of keeping them increases, not of course by the diminution of pasture, but through the increase of wolves. I am assured by evidence taken in the same district that wolves have notably increased in number since the reindeer herds dwindled. The explanation is, that the Lapps themselves diminish in numbers, and no longer wage war upon their natural enemy the wolf. The latter does not depend upon the reindeer for his existence or his increase, but upon the supply of young birds, small animals and the like, and his numbers do not decrease *pari passu* with the reindeer. Now these causes, which have been acting strongly in some of the districts adjacent to the lower portions of the line, near Pit , and Sorsele Lappmark and similar districts, will be certain to act with even greater rapidity in the districts adjacent to, or within reasonable reach of, these mining centres. The miner and the railway navvy receive very high wages. The demand for reindeer meat will be constant, and the prices paid will be high. The result will inevitably be the steady disappearance of the reindeer herds. And that means the steady extinction of the Lapp. No animal save the reindeer can be pastured on or can make a living out of the mosses of the high and barren fjeld of which millions of acres consist in Upper Sweden. And the Lapp, with very very rare exceptions, can live by no animal save the reindeer. Fifty years is the span which some Swedish ethnologists allow to their interesting little neighbour. He may, however, like his reindeer, survive as a curiosity for even a few years longer than that in very remote districts.

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But I would rather prophesy that his extinction will be an accomplished fact in a far shorter time.

Yet even more interesting than this sad result upon one of the races of Europe is the possible effect upon the future political map of Europe. If the reader will consult any good atlas he will accept my statement that the outline of the frontiers of Russian Finland, where it abuts on Norway and Sweden, is one of the most suggestive and astonishing things in the map of Europe. The Lulea-Ofoten line runs its whole length at about a distance of forty to fifty miles on the Swedish side of the Russian boundary line, following it with curious regularity and leaving a broad strip of Swedish territory between itself and the said boundary. That boundary follows the line of the Torné River and the Muonio River right up to the divide. Now at that point the Russian territory makes a most extraordinary little arm outstretched across the high and barren fjeld to the Norwegian frontier, which is at no great distance from the sea. This remarkable outline of frontier was permitted to Russia in the early part of the nineteenth century after her conquest of Russian Finland from Sweden—a conquest, it is interesting to remember, which was made by a sudden and masterly stroke without any declaration of war. Why, it must be asked, did Russia provide this extraordinary little narrow band, this little arm or finger which stretches across a piece of absolutely desolate and useless uninhabited fjeld? I do not think it is possible for anyone who looks at the map to hesitate for one moment in the reply. It was that Russia might bring her border as near as possible to the Atlantic Ocean, and wait upon events to give her her outlet across that narrow strip of Norway which alone bars her from a deep water harbour at Narvik, on the Ofoten Fjord. The draughtsmen of that frontier line—long ago in their graves—were as farsighted as Russian treaty makers have always proved. The feeling has long been strong amongst the more thoughtful and less reckless of the Norwegians that Russia aims at possessing the upper portion of Norway which shall give her her wished-for outlet. The harbour of Narvik, in spite of its high latitude, has open water all the winter through, and even if an exceptional winter should block it, navigation could easily be kept open by ice ships. The harbour is finely sheltered by high land, the water is deep enough to hold in parts a full-sized battleship. That is exactly what Russia desires and needs. And Russia has always had a way of getting what she needs and desires, and she has always shown

herself capable of waiting. She knows how to help on her opportunities, but she never needs to hurry them. And her opportunity will probably come before the century which we have just entered upon is closed. It is by no means difficult to imagine a combination of circumstances which should put it within the power of Russia to realise the ambition by which her Northern Empire shall stretch across the whole of the map of the Eastern Hemisphere from the Pacific to the Atlantic. The great White Bear already lies at full length across it: nothing but the tips of her toes remain inside that narrow strip of Norway which separates her from the sea.

It is no doubt from those unhappy internal dissensions which have caused bad blood between Norway and Sweden that Russia may take her best hope of obtaining her result. It is easy enough to make answer to the suggestions of the previous paragraph, that it is merely one more of the gratuitous accusations which are so often made against Russia; easy enough to ask how Russia could ever carry through a scheme to which none of the Great Powers would consent. But one only has to imagine a moment hereafter in which Great Britain is once more engaged in a struggle for life and death, such as the late Boer War, in some part of her enormous Empire; to imagine Germany kept quiet by the knowledge that an armed opposition to Russia means an armed opposition to France; to imagine at the same moment that the unhappy jealousies between the two Scandinavian countries have set these brothers by the throat. There would be Russia's welcome opportunity. To whichever country she should lend her strength in that dispute, she would equally hold the winning card. One cannot doubt that her policy, in either event, has long ago been foreseen and is probably long ago pigeon-holed at St. Petersburg. Probably she would throw her weight upon the side of Norway, in which case Sweden, easily vulnerable to Russia at Stockholm and the trading ports of the southern coast, and shut in between two enemies, could not hope to sustain the struggle for two months. And the price which Russia might bargain for in thus helping to establish an independent Norway under Russian protection would be, first, Narvik, with that narrow band of barren Norwegian fjeld which should suffice to unite her present Finnish border with the sea. It is not necessary even to imagine Russia possessing herself also of the slice of Northern Sweden through which the Lulea-Ofoten railway passes. Russia

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can easily make, and probably will make, a line within her own Finnish territory. Such a railway carried from the town of Tornea, already connected by rail with St. Petersburg, up the line of the Torné and Muonio rivers to that interesting little corner of the great divide which we have already spoken of, presents no insuperable difficulties to the engineer—probably none greater than the Swedes have already overcome. It would be costly, and commercially quite unprofitable, unless rich deposits of iron ore should be discovered within Russian territory. But as a means of transporting her troops from the already Russianised Duchy of Finland to her port on the Atlantic it would be very valuable and far less costly perhaps than the extra outrage to European feeling of annexing a great slice of Sweden so as to obtain the Lulea-Ofoten Railway. Once arrived at the end of that little projection which represents the present limit of Russian Finland to the west, they are within easy reach of Narvik.

The alternative method by which Russia should throw herself on the side of Sweden to repress Norway would be a much less promising policy. But in that case also the price of her assistance might be the same, namely, access to the western sea somewhere on Ofoten Fjord.

Viewed in the light of these suggestions, the recent events in Finland become a coherent and even necessary portion of Russia's policy. Without that policy to account for them they remain inexplicable. Anyone who knew Finland even so recently as ten years ago, before the day of her calamity, knows perfectly well that Russia had no more loyal province, in spite of free speech and of occasional vapourings. There was no portion of the Czar's dominions more prosperous, more progressive and more fit to be pointed to as an example of an enlightened policy in allowing a country to develop on its own lines, to its own great advantage and that of the empire of which it formed a part. There was no desire on the part of the vast majority of Finlanders, even of the Swedish party of the population, to exchange the rule of Russia for that of any of her nearer neighbours. She had proved herself quite worthy of the degree of freedom which had been granted to her by the charter of her constitution. She had even been spoken of frequently as a valuable buffer State between Russia and Sweden, and though the title was not exact, since a buffer State in the ordinary acceptance of the term should belong to neither nation, yet she had shown no tendency to coquet with Sweden, and had

fully thrown in her lot with that of Russia. What then had Russia to gain by the sudden extinction of the liberties granted nearly a hundred years before to this admirable people? What had Russia to gain by suddenly turning more than two millions of subjects loyal to the Czar and amongst his most useful dependents into a nation of sullen though helpless foemen. Those who attribute this action to the wanton and stupid barbarism of Russia, to the narrow-minded bigotry of the Orthodox party in Russia, or to the garden roller policy of her military despotism, do small justice to the sagacity which has always marked her advance in Europe. The step was a coolly calculated, deliberate part of her policy. It is the pushing forward of her truly Russian frontier, the advance of her military system, by the substitution of an advanced guard of genuinely Russian troops for the Finnish corps d'armée, who, however loyal in the main, would not be expected to fight with a good stomach against their Swedish neighbours when some day such services are needed. The action has brought Russia appreciably nearer to her goal.

The danger is, as we have said, fully recognised by many public men of calmer foresight both in Norway and Sweden. They cannot fail, too, to be conscious that that danger is brought nearer by the spirit of disunion which the rash utterances of certain speakers in Norway tend to foster. They are aware, too, that an independent Norway under Russian patronage means ultimate absorption in the Russian Empire. And though much of the apparent disaffection in Norway is, as I have heard Norwegians themselves declare, far more in words than in reality, yet it is a dangerous tool to play with, and one where careless use may encourage an ambition in Russia which none have so good reason to dread as Norwegians themselves. The moral is that the two Scandinavian nations would do well to adjust their differences. The Consular grievance, for example—arising from the appointment by the Swedish government of Swedes only for the large majority of Consularships—which always crops up whenever the relations between Norway and Sweden are under discussion, should admit of easy redress. And a few more standing grievances of no greater importance should be removed with equal ease. It is a quarrel between two brothers—there are no two nations in Europe to whom the title applies more literally—which at all events should be settled indoors. There must be, to use a homely phrase, no washing of linen outside of the premises. The interests of both

nations are one in eight points out of every ten. In no respect are they more absolutely one than in the preservation of the integrity, down to the last boulder, of the Great Scandinavian Peninsula.

The creation of the very interesting railway which has just been opened in no way created that danger, nor can it even be said, in one sense, to have increased it, since Russia can, as I have shown, accomplish her railway to the Norwegian frontier without going one foot outside of her own border; and a glance at the map will show that, in that case, it would not be the line from Riksgränsen to Narvik that she would employ. But the opening up of the country will have turned many eyes northwards, and it will probably have helped many who had not studied the map before to realise what the Russian frontier-makers realised a hundred years ago, and what Russian ambitions have assuredly never lost sight of since, namely, that it is no far cry from Russian territory to a fine naval port on the Western Ocean.

GERALD S. DAVIES.

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